

# Seychelles

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## Freedom of the Press

The media environment in Seychelles over the past decade has been characterized by government monopolization of radio and television, liberal use of draconian libel laws against opposition newspapers, occasional attacks against and harassment of media workers, and extensive self-censorship. However, conditions improved somewhat in 2013 due to a recent reduction in the cost of broadcast licenses, the issuing of new licenses, and the launching of the first private radio station as well as a new print outlet.

The constitution protects freedom of speech, but it also limits this guarantee with provisions protecting the reputation, rights, and privacy of citizens and the “interest of defense, public safety, public order, public morality, or public health.” It grants the minister of information the power to prohibit the broadcast of any material deemed contradictory to the “national interest.” Since the court of appeals in 2007 overturned a libel conviction against the opposition weekly *Regar*, which had forced it to close temporarily, both the filing of libel charges and libel convictions have diminished. Nevertheless, civil libel suits can still be used against journalists. In 2012, the editor of the newspaper *Le Nouveau Seychelles Weekly*, Ralph Volcere, who was also an opposition party leader, was found guilty of contempt of court under section 114 (1) of the penal code for an article challenging the neutrality of a sitting judge. Volcere was required to either publish an apology or pay a fine of 10,000 rupees (\$730). Seychelles has no freedom of information legislation in place.

The state has a de facto monopoly on television broadcasting, and until 2013 it controlled the only radio outlets as well. Private broadcasters have been slow to develop because of prohibitively large annual licensing fees, though these were reduced in 2012 from 800,000 rupees (\$67,000) to 100,000 rupees for radio and 250,000 rupees for television. Following one opposition party’s efforts to raise enough money for a radio license, the National Assembly in 2006 passed an amendment to the Broadcasting and Telecommunications Act prohibiting politically affiliated groups from obtaining a license.

In late 2009, the Seychelles Media Association, a grouping of media professionals, was reconstituted after a 10-year hiatus. The 2010 Seychelles Media Commission Act set up an independent media arbitration body, but questions have been raised about its neutrality. In May 2013, the commission published codes of conduct and ethics for journalists in the country.

A new Seychelles Broadcasting Corporation Act was passed in 2011, replacing legislation from 1992. The act was intended to increase the autonomy of the state-owned Seychelles Broadcasting Corporation (SBC), which runs the only television station and two radio stations. However, the period surrounding the 2011 presidential election highlighted the continued bias of the SBC in favor of the ruling Parti Lepep and its candidate, President James Michel, who won reelection. SBC media coverage is still dominated by the government, giving opposition parties only limited access.

There have been reports of the government monitoring e-mail, chat rooms, and blogs, and opposition activists have accused authorities of blocking their party websites. Individuals are commonly arrested, detained, and eventually released for posting critical comments about government officials on social-networking websites.

Incidents involving attacks on or harassment of journalists are uncommon. However, in October 2013, Volcere reported via Facebook that *Le Nouveau Seychelles Weekly*’s delivery vehicle had been severely

vandalized.

The state-owned daily *Seychelles Nation* rarely publishes stories that are critical of the government, and paid advertising accounts for 60 percent of the content. Pressure from advertisers has led to management restructuring and the departure of seven journalists since 2010. The independent daily *Today in Seychelles* has grown to become one of the leading newspapers since launching in 2011. The weekly *Le Seychellois Hebdo*, which also began publishing in 2011, takes a more critical stance toward the government. Three other weekly newspapers—*Regar*, the *People*, and *Le Nouveau Seychelles Weekly*—are affiliated with political parties. In February 2013, the newspaper *Rising Sun Daily News* abruptly ceased publication. However, a new triweekly paper, the *Victoria Times*, was launched in April. The SBC operates government-owned television and radio stations and relays foreign broadcasts. The government subsidizes 85 percent of the SBC budget, with the remaining 15 percent coming from private advertising. Since the 2012 reduction in broadcast licensing fees, authorities have granted two licenses to independent radio stations. In August 2013, one of those stations, Pure FM, went on the air, becoming the country's first private commercial radio outlet.

In 2012, Seychelles was connected to the Eastern Africa Submarine Cable System, which provided the country with greater telecommunications bandwidth. About 50 percent of the population accessed the internet in 2013. Telecommunications companies must submit subscriber information to the government, though the requirement was not enforced in 2013.

## **2014 Scores**

### **Press Status**

Partly Free

### **Press Freedom Score**

**(0 = best, 100 = worst)**

52

**(0 = best, 30 = worst)**

16

**(0 = best, 40 = worst)**

19

**(0 = best, 30 = worst)**

17